



Educating the **Whole Child**

While working to comply with standards for academic skills prescribed by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), educators must not lose sight of their equally important responsibility to teach social skills. Individuals do not develop into educated, competent members of society by learning academic skills, absent of social skills. A set of appropriate social skills is one of the most critical

elements for well-rounded individuals capable of full participation in a democratic society.

Like their failure to recognize that testing and test scores do not prove cognitive competence, the authors of NCLB failed to recognize the interface between content and social-skills competence. Though specific social skills should not be mandated by the legislature nor defined by govern-

mental agencies, teachers have a major responsibility to ensure that students learn the social skills which make them competent, capable citizens. It is imperative, then, that far-reaching legislation, such as NCLB, includes provisions to ensure instruction of the whole child.

The underlying principles of teaching social behavior are the same as those of teaching cognitive



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skills—assessment, planning, instruction, and evaluation. In each instance, the parallels are exact. First, as on the cognitive side of the equation, a broad range of diagnostic tools, suitable for use by teachers and other school professionals, is available to help assess student behavior (Peck 2003; Warger 1999). Second, data-based planning (with decision-making based on what is working, goals, and other available data) is crucial to ensuring that social-skills instruction is successful and complete (Freeman 2005). Third, in the same way teachers build a repertoire of instructional strategies to teach facts, basic skills, and concepts, so too should they develop an arsenal of teaching strategies suitable for instruction in social skills (McGinnis and Goldstein 1997; Goldstein and McGinnis 1997). Finally, evaluation of instruction aimed at social-skills learning is just as critical as evaluation of cognitive learning

in determining the success of our efforts (Keller and Duffy 2005).

Those who drafted NCLB had it right when they suggested that teachers must be competent in the skill areas they teach. Though not mandated, educators also must appreciate the importance of social skills as one of those areas. In light of the ever-increasing violence in schools and our communities, our responsibility as professionals is to rise to the challenge of ensuring that the emphases and demands of NCLB do not dominate in ways that cause us to neglect preparing the citizens of tomorrow. If schools are to be the safe haven we promise students, we must act on the belief that social skills are as important as cognitive skills in educating the whole child. ■

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